



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

Ansel Adams correspondence  
with Imogen Cunningham

Archives of American Art  
750 9th Street, NW  
Victor Building, Suite 2200  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Ansel Adams correspondence with Imogen Cunningham
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.adamanse
<b>Date:</b>	1949-1976
<b>Creator:</b>	Adams, Ansel, 1902-1984 Cunningham, Imogen, 1883-1976
<b>Extent:</b>	1 Microfilm reel (73 items on partial microfilm reel)
<b>Language:</b>	English .

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Photocopies of the letters were donated 1978 by Ansel Adams and microfilmed on reel 1410. Photocopies discarded after microfilming.

### Location of Originals

Original letters are owned by the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona.

### Related Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds the Ansel and Virginia Adams letters from Imogen Cunningham, 1966; the Imogen Cunningham papers, 1903-1991; and an oral history interview with Imogen Cunningham, 1975 June 9 conducted by Louise Katzman and Paul Karlstrom. The University of California, Berkeley Bancroft Library holds the Ansel Adams collection and the University of California, Los Angeles Charles E. Young Research Library holds the Ansel Adams Papers, 1938-1944. The University of Arizona, Center for Creative Photography holds the Ansel Adams archive, the Ansel Adams Miscellaneous Acquisitions collection, the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust, and the Imogen Cunningham Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection, 1920s-1974.

### Available Formats

35mm microfilm reel 1410 available for use at Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

### Reproduction Note

Letters are photocopies.

### Restrictions

The Archives of American Art does not own the originals. Microfilmed materials must be consulted on microfilm. Contact Reference Services for more information.

### Conditions Governing Use

Authorization to publish, quote or reproduce requires written permission from: Executor of the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust. Items for which publication permission is received must

carry the following credit: "Courtesy of the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona at Tucson." Contact Reference Services for more information.

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## Biographical / Historical

Ansel Adams (1902-1984) was an American landscape photographer known for his black and white images of the American West. He took some of his earliest photographs at national parks and as a member of the Sierra Club, which he joined at the age of 17. He was later contracted with the United States Department of the Interior to make photographs of national parks. In 1980, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his work and environmental advocacy.

With Fred Archer, Adams developed the Zone System, a technique to determine the ideal film exposure and development to achieve full tonal range. The clarity and depth resulting from this technique characterized Adams's photography.

Adams was a key advisor in establishing the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and helped to stage their first exhibition. He helped found Group f/64, an association of photographers who advocated for "pure" photography favoring sharp focus and the use of the full tonal range of a photograph. He also helped found the photography magazine *Aperture*, and co-founded the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona.

Virginia Best Adams (1904-2000) and Ansel Adams married in 1928. After her father, Harry Best, passed away in 1936, Virginia Best Adams managed Best's Studio (now the Ansel Adams Gallery), selling high quality merchandise including a series of Ansel Adams photographs called special edition prints. She was an active environmentalist and served on the board of directors of the Sierra Club from 1931 to 1933, was a Trustee of the Yosemite Natural History Association, and was also an avid mountaineer, credited with making the first ascent by a woman of a route on Mt. Whitney in what is now Sequoia National Park.

Imogen Cunningham (1883-1976) was a photographer in California known for her botanical photography, nudes, and industrial landscapes. Cunningham began her career producing soft-focus prints in the tradition of pictorialism. In the early 1920s she shifted focus to close-up, sharply detailed studies of plant life and other natural forms. In 1932, Cunningham joined Ansel Adams in Group f/64, a group formed in opposition to pictorialism and dedicated to precisely exposed images.

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## Scope and Contents

This microfilm collection of Ansel Adams correspondence with Imogen Cunningham consists of correspondence between Ansel and his wife Virginia Best Adams and Imogen Cunningham. Most letters are from Cunningham. They write about their work and about both artistic and technical problems of photography, about various proposals for a monograph on Cunningham, about Nathan Lyons and Karl Struss, and about personal matters. In one letter, Mrs. Adams offers Cunningham detailed advice on the disposition of her works and papers after her death.

## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Photography  
Women artists

Names:

Adams, Virginia Best  
Lyons, Nathan  
Struss, Karl, 1886-

Occupations:

Photographers  
Photographers -- California